

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 45, 54, and 55 as follows:

1-44. (Cancelled)

45. (Currently Amended) A tubular casing structure for use with food products, comprising:

circumferential threads extending around a periphery of ~~said~~ a tubular casing and spaced at intervals along said tubular casing, said circumferential threads comprising an elastic thread in combination with a yarn wrapped around and along a length of said elastic thread, wherein a limited number of turns of said yarn are provided around said elastic thread for a given length of said circumferential threads so that said circumferential threads become taut after a predetermined amount of stretch due to said yarn being straightened to an extent where said yarn resists tensile force whereupon said circumferential threads become inextensible

46. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 45, further comprising a knitted tube with said circumferential threads attached to said knitted tube.

47. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 45, wherein said tubular casing is a tubular net comprising radially spaced longitudinal threads in combination with said circumferential threads and

wherein said circumferential threads comprise a continuous thread extending spirally along said tubular casing.

48. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 47, further comprising a tubular fibrous casing located within and co-extensive with said tubular net, said fibrous casing comprising an inner liner for said tubular net.

49. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 48, wherein said circumferential threads become taut at a diameter which is substantially equal to the diameter of said tubular fibrous casing when it is filled.

50. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 49, wherein the diameter of said tubular fibrous casing is greater than the diameter of said tubular net prior to stretching of said circumferential threads so that said circumferential threads apply compressive force to said fibrous casing as it is being filled.

51. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 50, wherein the diameter of said fibrous casing is between 2 and 4 times greater than the diameter of said tubular net prior to stretching of said circumferential threads.

52. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 50, wherein the diameter of said tubular net when said circumferential threads become taut is smaller than the diameter of said fibrous casing so that said circumferential and longitudinal threads press inwardly against said fibrous casing.

53. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 48, wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said tubular net.

54. (Currently Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 45, wherein said tubular casing is a knitted tube that is stretchable and impermeable to said food products and longitudinal threads in combination with said circumferential threads, said circumferential and longitudinal threads ~~being~~ secured to and spaced, respectively, along and around said knitted tube, said knitted tube ~~still~~ being stretchable ~~when~~ after said circumferential threads become taut so that said circumferential and longitudinal threads press into a surface of said food product so that a quilted surface pattern is applied to the surface of said food products in contact with said tubular casing.

55. (Currently Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 54, wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to said first tubular portion ~~as~~ during knitting of said first tubular portion ~~is being knitted~~.

56. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 54, wherein said circumferential threads are secured to said knitted tube so as to form a continuous spiral along said knitted tube, said longitudinal threads comprise interlocking loop stitches, each said loop stitch extending between said circumferential threads.

57. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 54, wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to an outer surface of said knitted tube.

58. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 51, wherein the diameter of said tubular net when said circumferential threads become taut is smaller than the diameter of said fibrous casing so that said circumferential and longitudinal threads press inwardly against said fibrous casing.

59. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 49, wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said tubular net.

60. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 50, wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said tubular net.

61. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 51, wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said tubular net.

62. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 52, wherein said fibrous casing is folded flat with at least one pleat so that its width is reduced to fit within said tubular net.

63. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 55, wherein said circumferential threads are secured to said knitted tube so as to form a continuous spiral along the length of said knitted tube, said longitudinal threads comprise interlocking loop stitches, each said loop stitch extending between said circumferential threads.

64. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 55, wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to the outer surface of said knitted tube.

65. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 56, wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to the outer surface of said knitted tube.

66. (Previously Amended) A tubular casing according to claim 63, wherein said circumferential and longitudinal threads are secured to the outer surface of said knitted tube.